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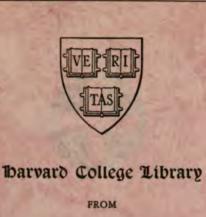


By z Richard Watson Gilder

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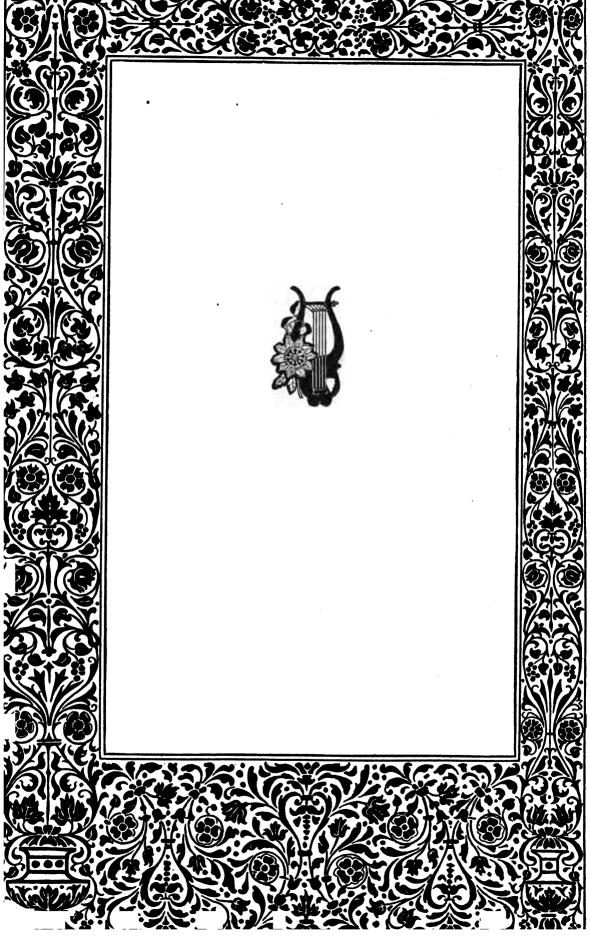


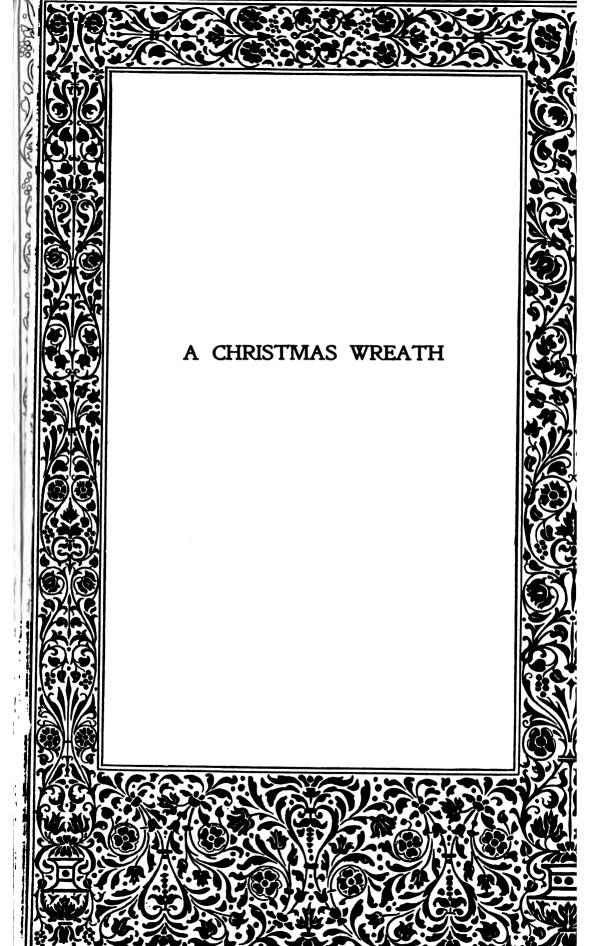
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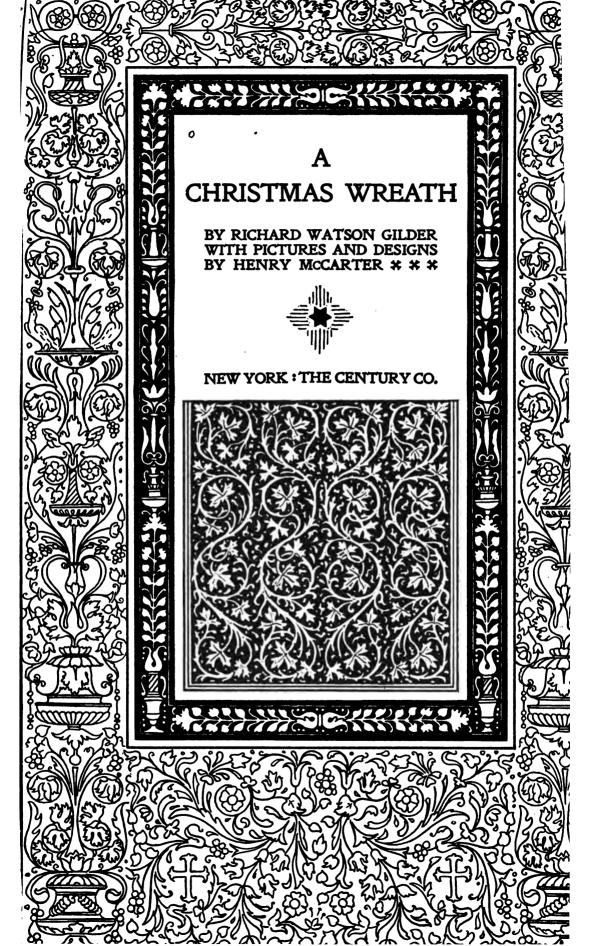
the library of Francis G. Peabody

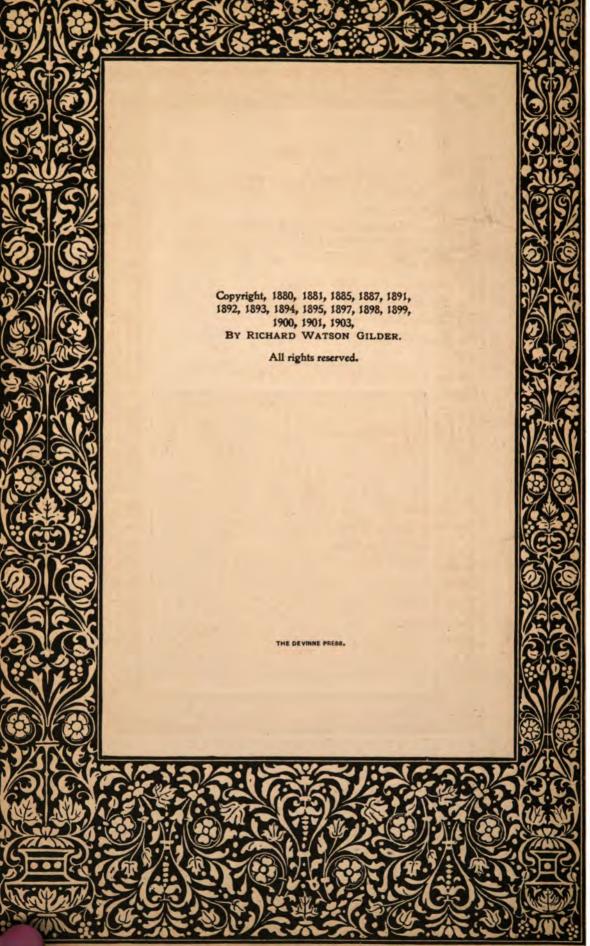


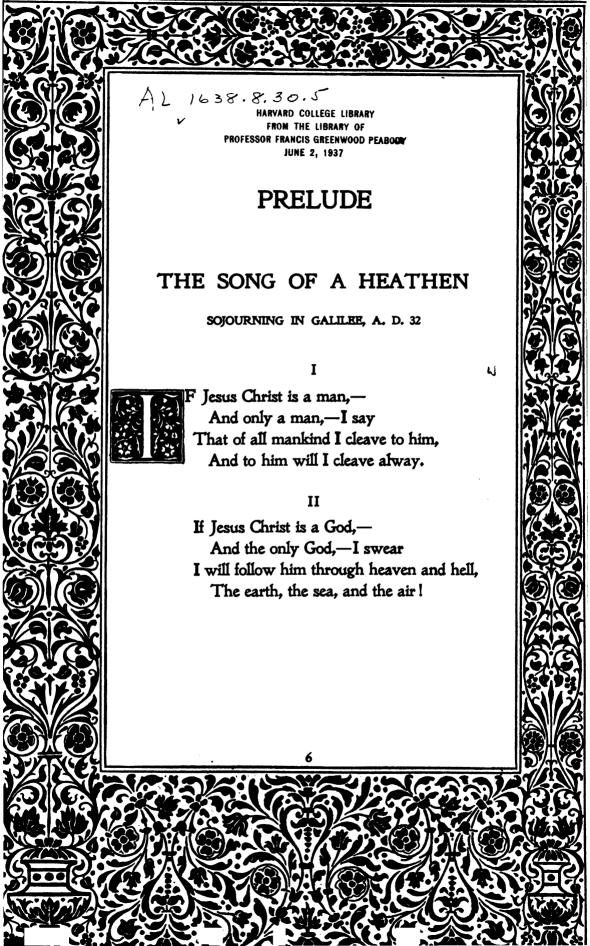














A CHRISTMAS HYMN

1



ELL me, what is this innumerable throng
Singing in the heavens a loud, angelic song?
These are they who come with swift and
shining feet

From round about the throne of God the Lord of Light to greet.

II

Oh, who are these that hasten beneath the starry sky, As if with joyful tidings that through the world shall fly?

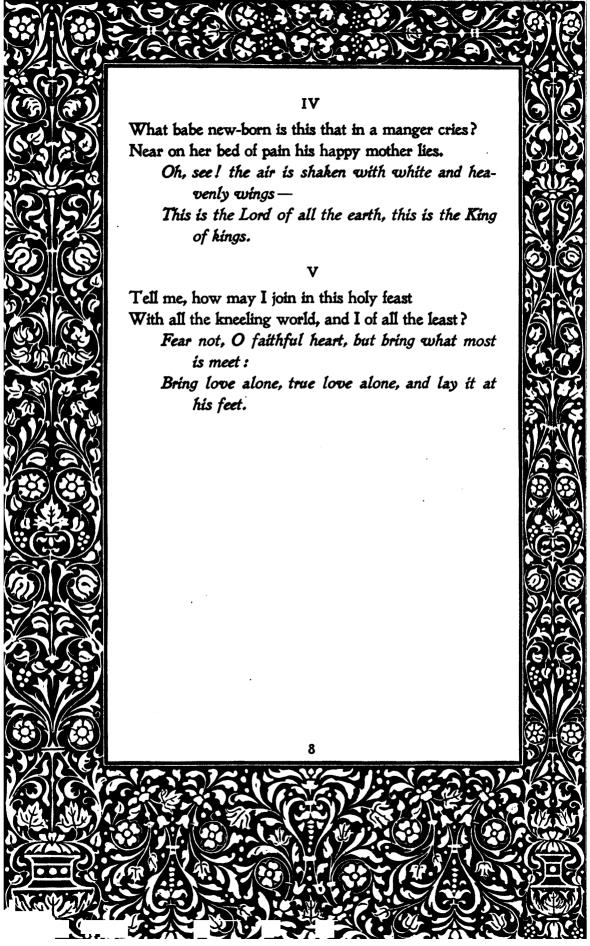
The faithful shepherds these, who greatly were afeared

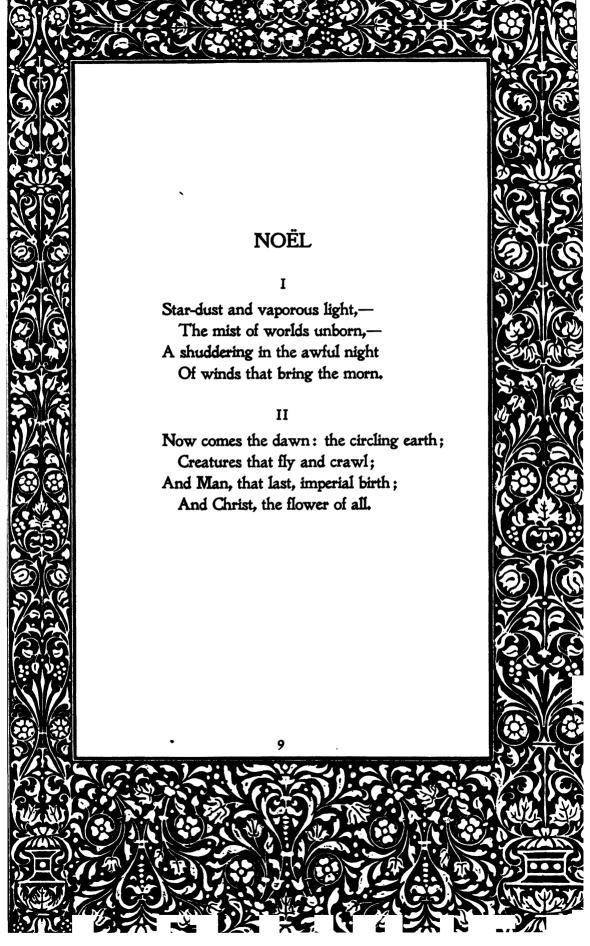
When, as they watched their flocks by night, the heavenly host appeared.

III

Who are these that follow across the hills of night
A star that westward hurries along the fields of light?
Three wise men from the East who myrrh and treasure bring

To lay them at the feet of him their Lord and Christ and King.







I

I heard the bells of Bethlehem ring—
Their voice was sweeter than the priests';
I heard the birds of Bethlehem sing
Unbidden in the churchly feasts.

II

They clung and sung on the swinging chain High in the dim and incensed air; The priests, with repetitions vain, Chanted a never-ending prayer.

III

So bell and bird and priest I heard, But voice of bird was most to me; It had no ritual, no word, And yet it sounded true and free.

IV

I thought Child Jesus, were he there, Would like the singing birds the best, And clutch his little hands in air And smile upon his mother's breast.

A MADONNA OF FRA LIPPO LIPPI

I

No heavenly maid we here behold, Though round her brow a ring of gold; This baby, solemn-eyed and sweet, Is human all from head to feet.

H

Together close her palms are prest In worship of that godly guest; But glad her heart and unafraid While on her neck his hand is laid.

III

Two children, happy, laughing, gay, Uphold the little child in play; Not flying angels these, what though Four wings from their four shoulders grow.

IV

Fra Lippo, we have learned from thee A lesson of humanity;
To every mother's heart forlorn,
In every house the Christ is born.

THE CHRIST-CHILD

A PICTURE BY FRANK VINCENT DU MOND

I

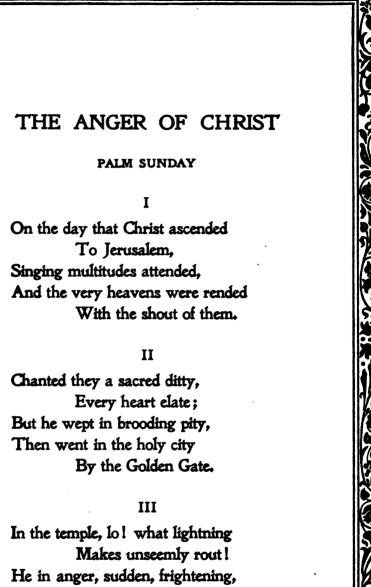
Done is the day of care.
Into the shadowy room
Flows the pure evening light,
To stem the gathering gloom,
The lily's flame illume,
And the bowed heads make bright—
The heads bowed low in prayer.

II

See how the level rays
Through the white garments pour
Of the holy child, who stands,
With bending brow, to implore
Grace on the toilers' store;
Oh, see those sinless hands!
Behold, the Christ-child prays!

III

Wait, wait, ye lingering rays,
Stand still, O Earth and Sun,
Draw near, thou Soul of God—
This is the suffering one!
Already the way is begun
The pierced Saviour trod;
And now the Christ-child prays,
The holy Christ-child prays.



Drives with scorn and scourge the whitening Money-changers out.

IV

By the way that Christ descended
From Mount Olivet,
I, a lonely pilgrim, wended,
On the day his entry splendid
Is remembered yet.

v

And I thought: If he, returning
On this festival,
Here should haste with love and yearning,
Where would now his fearful, burning
Anger flash and fall?

VI

In the very house they builded

To his saving name,

'Mid their altars, gemmed and gilded,

Would his scourge and scorn be wielded,

His fierce lightning flame.

VII

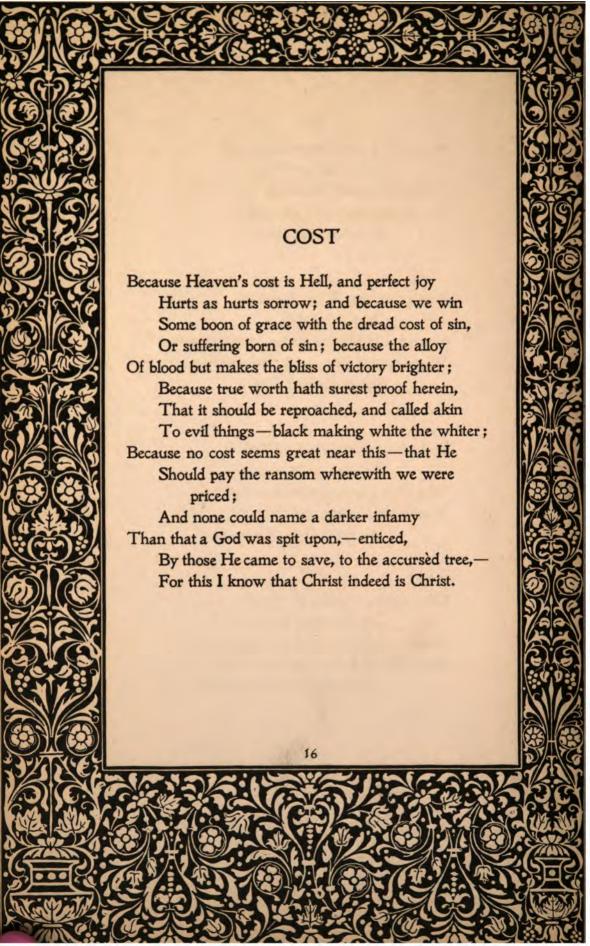
Once again, O Man of Wonder,

Let thy voice be heard!

Speak as with a sound of thunder;

Drive the false thy roof from under;

Teach thy priests thy word.



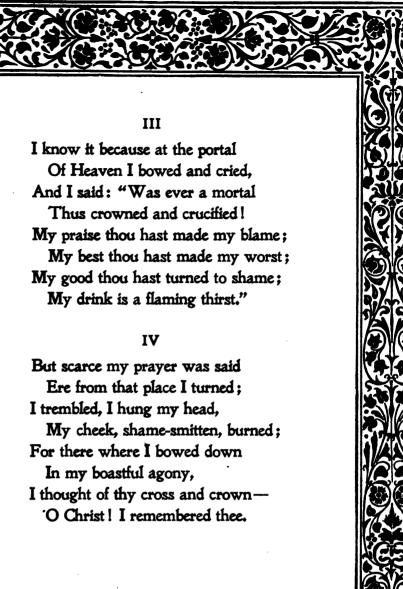
"THERE IS NOTHING NEW UNDER THE SUN"

I

There is nothing new under the sun;
There is no new hope or despair;
The agony just begun
Is as old as the earth and the air.
My secret soul of bliss
Is one with the singing stars,
And the ancient mountains miss
No hurt that my being mars.

II

I know as I know my life,
I know as I know my pain,
That there is no lonely strife,
That he is mad who would gain
A separate balm for his woe,
A single pity and cover;
The one great God I know
Hears the same prayer over and over.



HOLY LAND

This is the earth he walked on; not alone
That Asian country keeps the sacred stain;
Ah, not alone the far Judean plain,
Mountain and river! Lo, the sun that shone
On him, shines now on us; when day is gone
The moon of Galilee comes forth again
And lights our path as his; an endless chain
Of years and sorrows makes the round world one.
The air we breathe, he breathed—the very air
That took the mold and music of his high
And godlike speech. Since then shall mortal dare
With base thought front the ever-sacred sky—
Soil with foul deed the ground whereon he laid
In holy death his pale, immortal head!



I

When in the starry gloom
They sought the Lord Christ's tomb,
Two angels stood in sight
All dressed in burning white
Who unto the women said:
"Why seek ye the living among the dead?"

II

His life, his hope, his heart,
With death they had no part;
For this those words of scorn
First heard that holy morn,
When the waiting angels said:
"Why seek ye the living among the dead?"

III

O, ye of this latter day,
Who journey the selfsame way—
Through morning's twilight gloom
Back to the shadowy tomb;
To you, as to them, was it said:
"Why seek ye the living among the dead?"



The Lord is risen indeed,

He is here for your love, for your need—

Not in the grave, nor the sky,

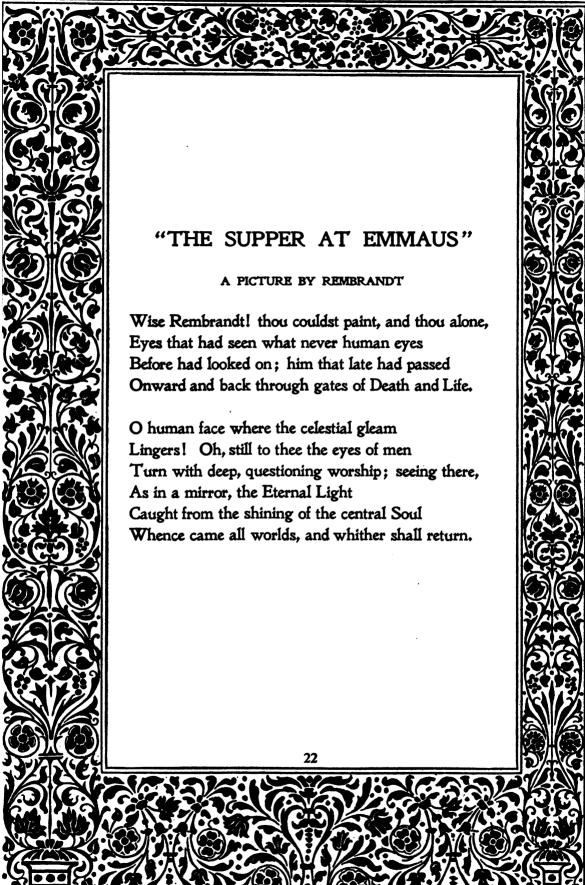
But here where men live and die;

And true the word that was said:

"Why seek ye the living among the dead?"

V

Wherever are tears and sighs,
Wherever are children's eyes,
Where man calls man his brother,
And loves as himself another,
Christ lives! The angels said:
"Why seek ye the living among the dead?"



EGYPT AND SYRIA

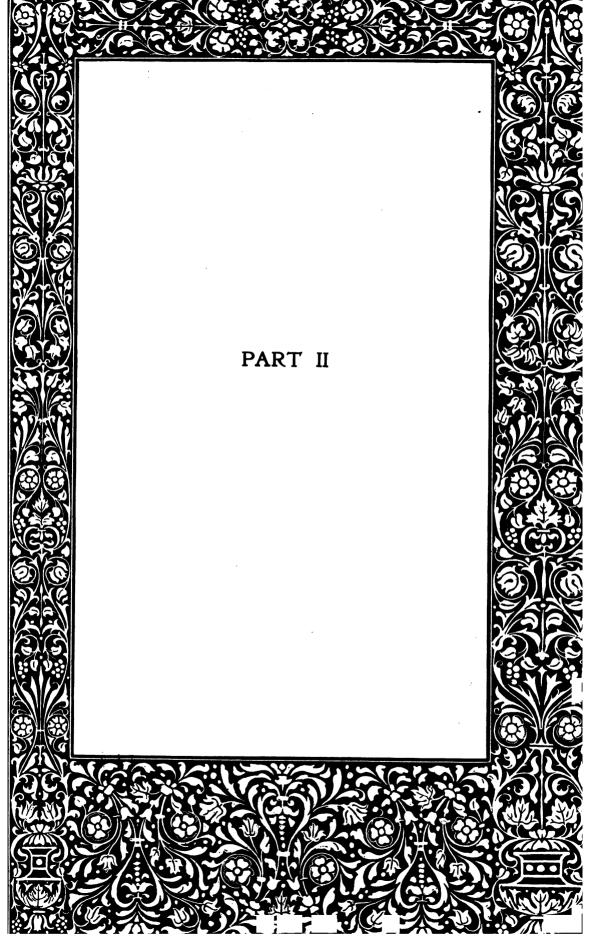
EGYPT

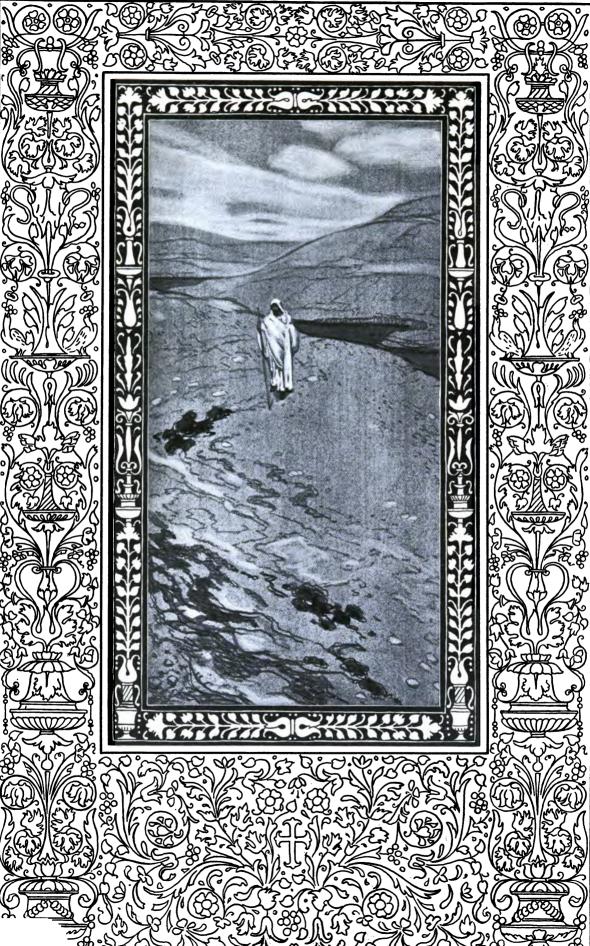
I thought, in Egypt, Death was more than Life, It seemed so vast; its monuments so great; The emptiness of tombs was such high state,— No living thought, or power, or potentate So glorious seemed, wrapt in such splendid gloom. For I perceived that in each ancient tomb, Long ages since, dead kings for Death made room. Not here the Dead, but Death:—alone, supreme: In Egypt Death was real,—Life a winged Dream.

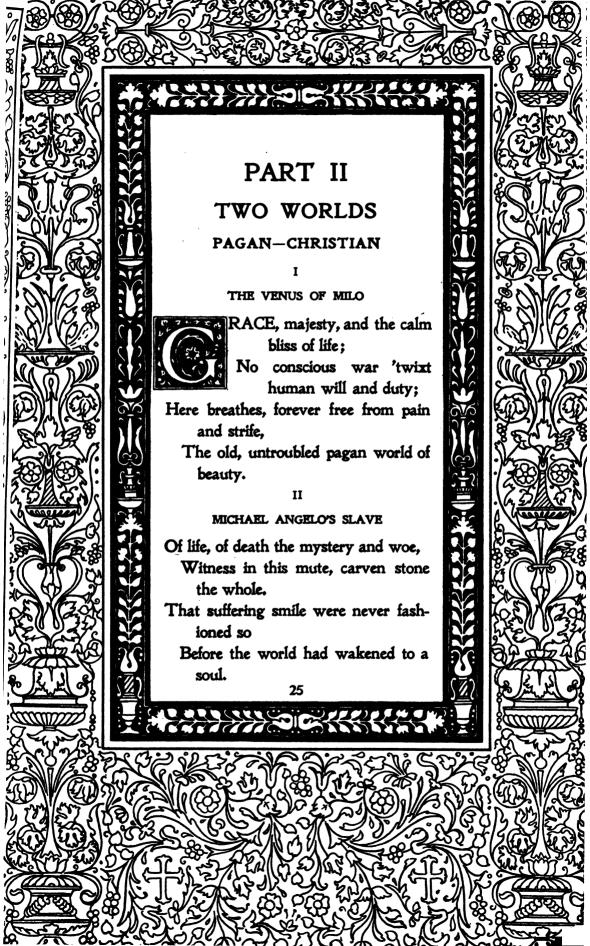
SYRIA

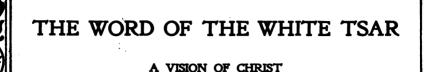
I thought, in Syria, Life was more than Death. A tomb there was forsaken of its dead, But death filled not the place; here with bowed head Worships the world forever at the tread Of one who lived, who liveth, and shall live,—Whose grave is but a footstep on the sod; Men kiss the ground where living feet have trod. Here not to Death but Life, they worship give. August is Death, but this one tomb is rife With a more mighty presence; it is Life.











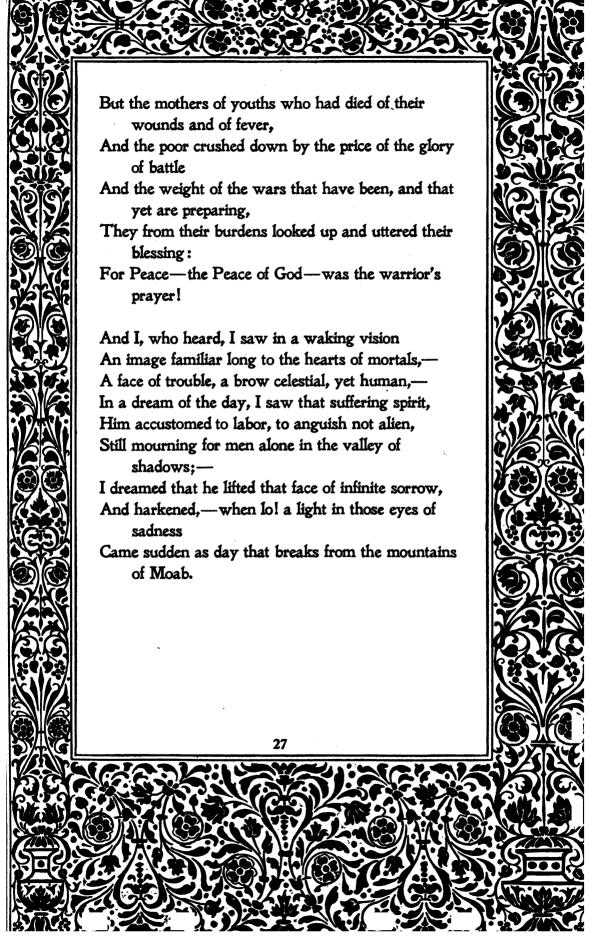
This day, a strange and beautiful word was spoken,—
Not with the voice of a child, nor the voice of a woman,
Nor yet with the voice of a poet, the melody sounded,—
Forth from the lips of a warrior, girt for the battle,
Breathed this word of words o'er a world astonished.

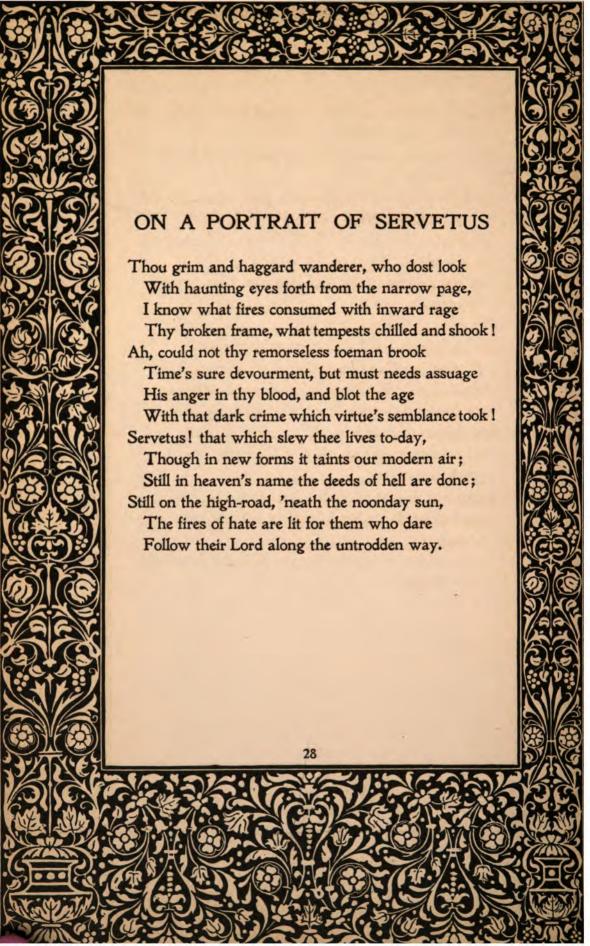
Prisoners returning from war, and conquering armies,
Navies flushed with new and amazing victory,
Heard the message, so strange, so high, so entrancing,
And soldiers dying of wounds or the wasting of fever.
In tropic islands it sounded, through wrecks of cities;
O'er burning plains where warlike death was in
waiting;

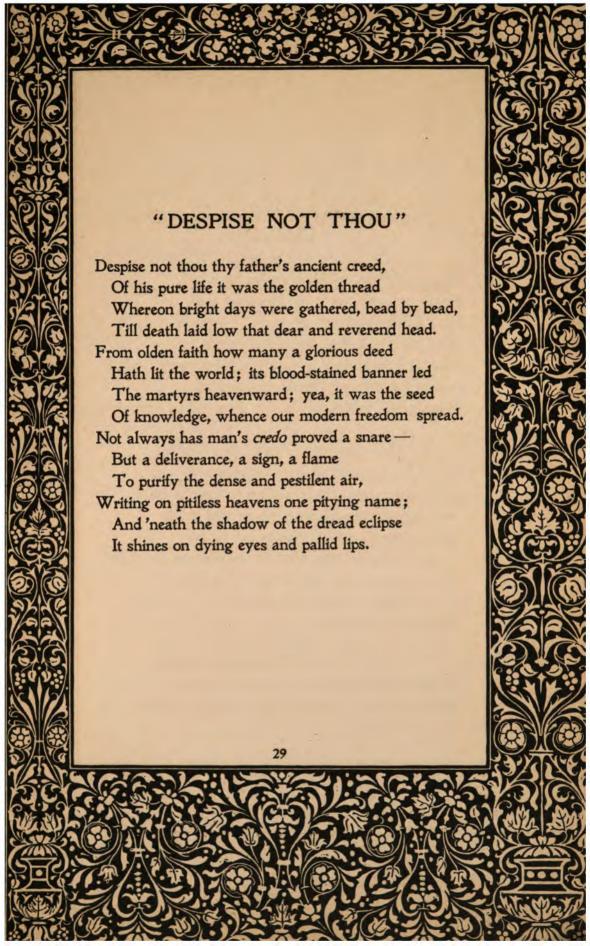
Armies and navies confronting, in watchful silence, Heard it and wondered; statesmen stopped their debates,

And turning their eyes toward the voice, with its meaning unlooked for,

Listened and smiled with the smile and the sneer of the cynic.









How easily my neighbor chants his creed,
Kneeling beside me in the House of God.
His "I believe" he chants, and "I believe,"
With cheerful iteration and consent—
Watching meantime the white, slow sunbeam move
Across the aisle, or listening to the bird
Whose free, wild song sounds through the open door.

Thou God supreme,—I too, I too, believe!
But oh! forgive if this one human word,
Binding the deep and breathless thought of thee
And my own conscience with an iron band,
Stick in my throat. I cannot say it, thus—
This "I believe" that doth thyself obscure;
This rod to smite; this barrier; this blot
On thy most unimaginable face
And soul of majesty.

'T is not man's faith In thee that he proclaims in echoed phrase, But faith in man; faith not in thine own Christ, But in another man's dim thought of him.

Christ of Judea, look thou in my heart!

Do I not love thee, look to thee, in thee

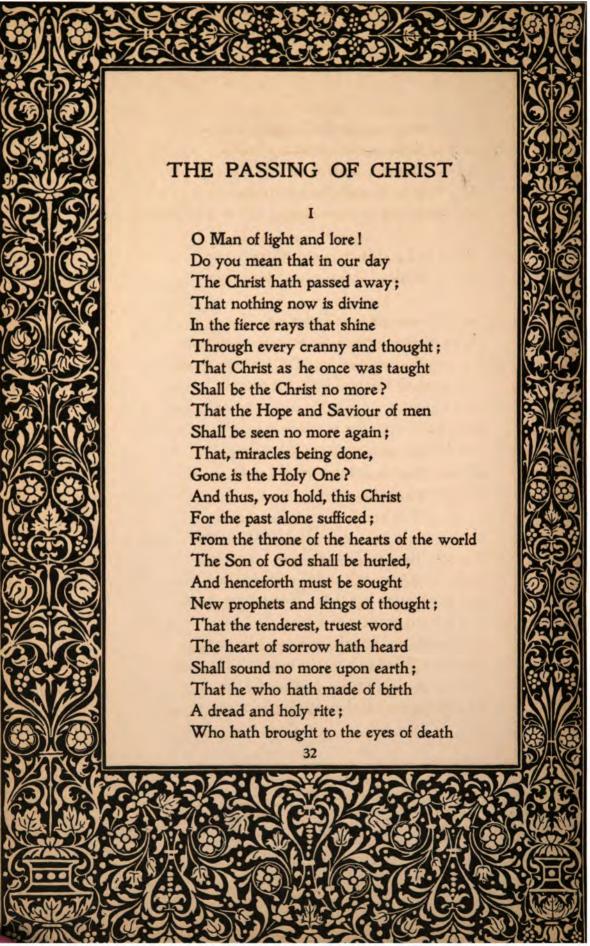
Alone have faith of all the sons of men—

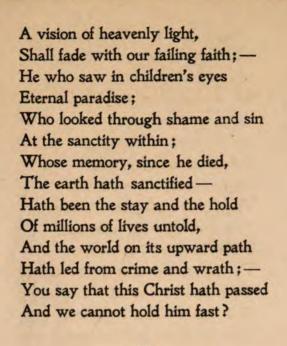
Faith deepening with the weight and woe of years?

Pure soul and tenderest of all that came Into this world of sorrow, hear my prayer:

Lead me, yea, lead me deeper into life,
This suffering, human life wherein thou liv'st
And breathest still, and hold'st thy way divine.
'T is here, O pitying Christ, where thee I seek,
Here where the strife is fiercest; where the sun
Beats down upon the highway thronged with men,
And in the raging mart. Oh! deeper lead
My soul into the living world of souls
Where thou dost move.

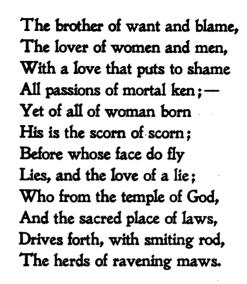
But lead me, Man Divine,
Where'er thou will'st, only that I may find
At the long journey's end thy image there,
And grow more like to it. For art not thou
The human shadow of the infinite Love
That made and fills the endless universe!
The very Word of him, the unseen, unknown
Eternal Good that rules the summer flower
And all the worlds that people starry space!





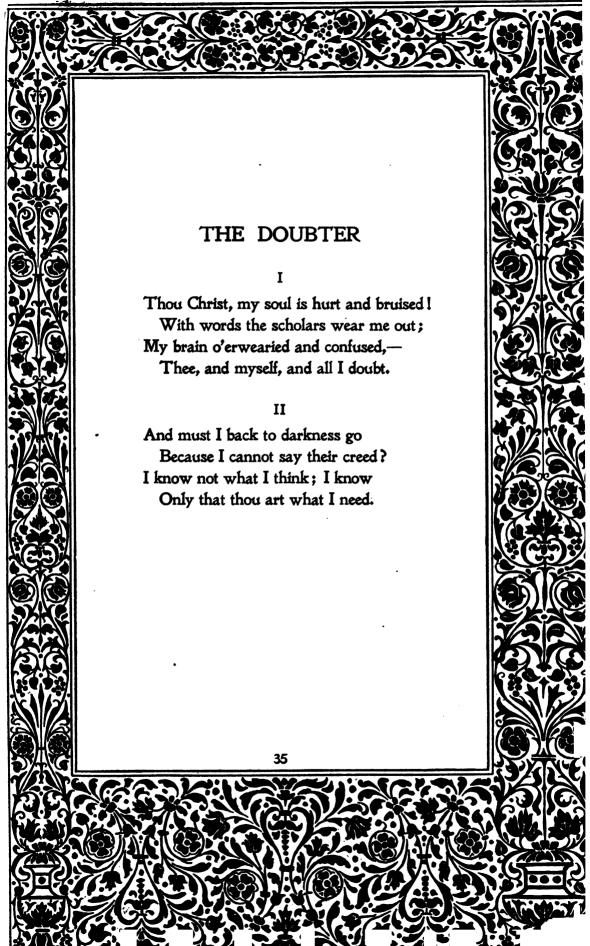
II

Ah no! If the Christ you mean
Shall pass from this time, this scene,
These hearts, these lives of ours,
'T is but as the summer flowers
Pass, but return again,
To gladden a world of men.
For he,—the only, the true,—
In each age, in each waiting heart,
Leaps into life anew;
Though he pass, he shall not depart.
Behold him now where he comes!
Not the Christ of our subtile creeds,
But the lord of our hearts, of our homes,
Of our hopes, our prayers, our needs;



'T is he, as none other can,
Makes free the spirit of man,
And speaks, in darkest night,
One word of awful light
That strikes through the dreadful pain
Of life, a reason sane—
That word divine which brought
The universe from nought.

Ah no, thou life of the heart,
Never shalt thou depart!
Not till the leaven of God
Shall lighten each human clod;
Not till the world shall climb
To thy height serene, sublime,
Shall the Christ who enters our door
Pass to return no more.



IN PALESTINE

T

Ah no! that sacred land
Where fell the wearied feet of the lone Christ
Robs not the soul of faith. I shall set down
The thought was in my heart. If that hath lost
Aught of its child-belief, 't was long ago,
Not there in Palestine; and if 't were lost,
He were a coward who should fear to lose
A blind, hereditary, thoughtless faith,—
Comfort of fearful minds, a straw to catch at
On the deep-gulfed and tempest-driven sea.

Full well I know how shallow spirits lack
The essence, flinging from them but the form;
I have seen souls lead barren lives and cursed,—
Bereft of light, and all the grace of life,—
Because for them the inner truth was lost
In the frail symbol—hated, shattered, spurned.

But faith that lives forever is not bound To any outward semblance, any scheme Fine-wrought of human wonder, or self-love, Or the base fear of never-ending pain. True faith doth face the blackness of despair,—Blank faithlessness itself; bravely it holds
To duty unrewarded and unshared;
It loves where all is loveless; it endures
In the long passion of the soul for God.

At last the very land whose breath he breathed,
The very hills his bruised feet did climb!
This is his Olivet; on this Mount he stood,
As I do now, and with this same surprise
Straight down into the startling blue he gazed
Of the fair, turquoise mid-sea of the plain.
That long, straight, misty, dream-like, violet wall
Of Moab,—lo, how close it looms; the same
Quick, human wonder struck his holy vision.
About these feet the flowers he knew so well.
Back where the city's shadow slowly climbs
There is a wood of olives gaunt and gray,
And centuries old; it holds the name it bore
That night of agony and bloody sweat.

I tell you when I looked upon these fields
And stony valleys,—through the purple veil
Of twilight, or what time the Orient sun
Made shining jewels of the barren rocks,—
Something within me trembled; for I said:
This picture once was mirrored in his eyes;
This sky, that lake, those hills, this loveliness,

To him familiar were; this is the way
To Bethany; the red anemones
Along you wandering path mark the steep road
To green-embowered Jordan. All is his:
These leprous outcasts pleading piteously;
This troubled country,—troubled then as now,
And wild and bloody,—this is his own land.
On such a day, girdled by these same hills,
Pressed by this dark-browed, sullen, Orient crowd,
On yonder mount, spotted with crimson blooms,
He closed his eyes, in that dark tragedy
Which mortal spirit never dared to sound.
O God! I saw those haunting eyes in every throng.

II

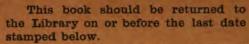
Were he divine, and maker of all worlds,
The Godhead veiled in suffering, for our sins,—
An unimagined splendor poured on earth
In sacrifice supreme,—this were a scene
Fit for the tears of angels and all men.
If he were man,—a passionate human heart,
Like unto ours, but with intenser fire,
And whiter from the deep and central glow;
Who loved all men as never man before,
Who felt as never mortal all the weight
Of this world's sorrow, and whose sinless hands
Upstretched in prayer did seem, indeed, to clutch
The hand divine; if he were man, yet dreamed
That the Ineffable through him had power—

Even through his touch—to scatter human pain (Setting the eternal seal on his high hope And promised kingdom); were he only man, Thus, thus to aspire, and thus at last to fall! Such anguish! such betrayal! Who could paint That tragedy! one human, piteous cry—"Forsaken!"—and black death! If he were God, 'T was for an instant only, his despair; Or were he man, and there is life beyond, And, soon or late, the good rewarded are, Then, too, is recompense.

But were he man, And death ends all; then was that tortured death On Calvary a thing to make the pulse Of memory quail and stop.

The blackest thought
The human brain may harbor comes that way.
Face that,—face all,—yet lose not hope nor heart!
One perfect moment in the life of love,
One deed wherein the soul unselfed gleams forth,—
These can outmatch all ill, all doubt, all fear,
And through the encompassing burden of the world
Burn swift the spirit's pathway to its God.





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